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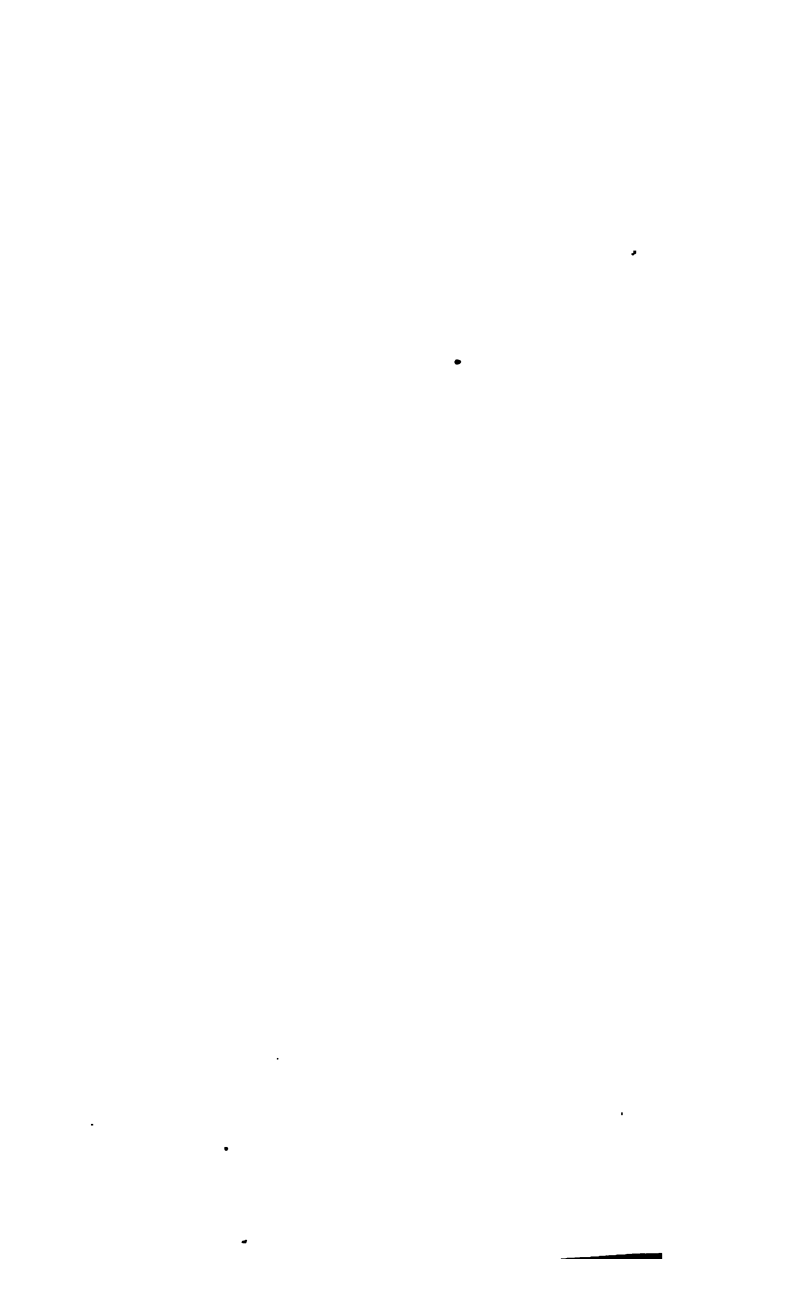
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SKETCHES
OF
MODERN IRRELIGION AND INFIDELITY.

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SKETCHES
OF
MODERN IRRELIGION AND INFIDELITY,

WITH SOME RESULTS

Of late extensive travels on the Continent;

AND EXTRACTS OF
LETTERS TO AN ANGLICAN BISHOP
ON THE PRESENT STATE OF RELIGION THERE.

BY THE
REV. BUCHAN W. WRIGHT, M.A.
CHAPLAIN TO THE BRITISH RESIDENTS AT TRIESTE.

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THESE ESSAYS ARE DEDICATED WITH THE
UTMOST RESPECT
TO HIS FORMER REVERED DIOCESAN,
THE BISHOP OF LINCOLN,
BY HIS LORDSHIP'S FAITHFUL AND OBEDIENT
SERVANT,
THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

It is a singular phenomenon that whilst the excellence of the Christian morality is admitted by the Infidel and the Rationalist ; the dogma and the faith out of which this morality springs, is hated and calumniated ; and yet the wonder remains to be explained how so pure a morality should have its source in a faith so hateful to the infidel. The morality that proceeds from " free thought " in religion and " free intelligence " has convulsed Europe, and has not made it happy. But that Modern Infidelity is not altogether without excuse in its great revolt against a corrupt Christianity, it has been the object of the following pages to show. These Essays are in part the result of observations

•

made during various extensive journies on the Continent which the author undertook, partly at his own expense, and partly at the expense of an English Missionary Society, for which he entertains the highest respect as being a useful instrument in the hands of the Great Head of the Church, for the propagation of truth amongst a most singular and interesting people, in whom, the Author believes, the future welfare and prosperity of the Church of Christ are much involved.

Trieste, June 21, 1851.

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SKETCHES
OF
MODERN IRRELIGION AND INFIDELITY.

I.

THE PREVALENCE OF SUBVERSIVE IDEAS, AND THE NEEDFULNESS OF A REMEDY.

LIBERTY seems to put on different aspects at different times and in different countries. In one country it is "a spark ever threatening to ignite the fire-damp of revolution;" in another it is "a lamp guiding onwards to happiness and peace." The peculiar disposition of the people concerned, may have something to do with this, but not so much as their religious state ; for when the fear of God and a knowledge of his Law are not to a certain extent engraven upon the heart of a nation or people, it seems that the graduates of liberty are emancipated only to

exhibit the vices of the enfranchised, without the virtues of the truly free.

From all quarters of continental Christendom we hear of the spread of irreligion, infidelity, and lawlessness. From Northern Germany, Professor Tholuck writes, that, "Since the late revolution, indifference to religion, and hostility against it, are on the increase ; the relaxation on the part of the Government, in the administration of the laws, having ended in the bursting open of the flood-gates of iniquity and the general loosening of all moral restraint." And another writer, inclined himself to favour excess of freedom of thought in religion, says that, "in comparison with the God-denying, infidel, presumptuous egotism of the day, the self-deification of the Romish Antichrist appears but child's-play."* In an ultramontane voice from Rome, published by authority, shortly previous to the return of the Pope, that city is thus described by the writer :

* De Wette.

“Infidelity and immorality have spread amongst us to such an extent, that we have more need of apostolic missions than the inhabitants of China, or those that dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth.” The same author tells us that “not only the Romagna but all Northern Italy, is infected with the plague-spot of infidelity and religious scepticism.”* The Roman Catholic prelates who were assembled in Wurtzburg, in 1849, describe the irreligion and infidelity of central Europe in striking words, which have since been re-echoed by the Archbishops of Lyons and Vienna, in lamentations and remon-

* “*Il Cattolicismo e la Demagogia Italiana.*” But this is not the first time that Rome’s irreligion has thus been described by one of her own children. Petrarch thus describes the Rome of his day :

“Fontana di dolora, Albergo d’Ira
Scuola d’errori, Tempio d’Heresia,
Gia Roma, hor’ Babilonia, empia eria
Per cui tanto si piagne, e si sospira.”

And Guicciardini, referring to his own times, compares Rome to Cairo, and says, “What generation is there in the world more corrupted, more polluted, with more brutish and beastly manners than ours?”

strances equally impressive. And although the Archbishop of Paris has lately said, that "on the last occasion the Church came off renovated and triumphant," yet, he also adds, "that he cannot help feeling sinister presentiments in regard to the future;" and then calls upon the clergy to "remove from the theatre, where, for the misfortune of the nations, the terrible tragedy is about to be performed." Who can tell what amount of justification all this irreligion and ungodliness finds in the state of the Church itself. We are told by a well-known German writer, that "it was the corruption and worldly character of the Papacy that produced the movements in society that have led to the present convulsed and distracted state of Christendom."* And an eminent English historian attributes the terrible convulsion of the first French Revolution to "the abuses of the Church, the selfishness of the noblesse, and the extrava-

* Ranke.

gance of the monarchy.”* The great apostle of infidelity knew too well the secret of his time, and strove, we are told, “not so much to bring about a change of institutions, laws, and governments, as to annihilate spiritual tyranny, the arts of priests, and the benightenment of superstition.” But Voltairian ideas, or ideas analogous to them, have now made the round of Europe ; for Quinet says truly, that, “the philosophy of the eighteenth century and that of the nineteenth, after having long disputed and contradicted each other, end in being reconciled, and embracing over the ruins of the same faith.” And although Northern Germany is now the chief stronghold of infidelity ; (for there it assumes a more intellectual character, and is more the result of unsanctified reflection ;) yet there is reason to believe, that, with the exception of the interior of Russia, there is no European province or district where the people have not in an

* Alison.

infidel sense eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Could one man have thus easily been permitted to "shake an empire mightier than that of Charlemagne, a man against a priesthood, an individual against an institution, a life against centuries," * if the Christianity which prevailed in Europe had been the same vital thing which the Saviour and his apostles left behind them on earth? And is there not reason to fear that the long withholding from the people of the Bible, the Book of oppressed souls, (in which the Romanist is now aided by the Rationalist)† has produced a great moral want in the masses, and that the expression of this want is likely to become an act of retribution against those whose duty it is to satisfy it? Thus Theiner, in his reply to Rosmini on "The Five Plagues of the Church," tells us

* Lamartine.

† "The Rationalist and the Romanist," observes Dr. M'Caul, "appear at first sight to be at the greatest possible distance from each other. But they have a common bond of union, the overthrow of the authority of the Bible." *Thoughts on Rationalism.*

that "the great and dreaded evil of the day, is not as in former times the "Cesare-Papismo," but the "Popolo-Papismo;" and a burdensome stone it is likely to be for many a day around the neck of the "Vero-Papismo," whose hoar head it will not allow to go down to the grave in peace. "It is therefore high time that the Papacy, like Leo before Attila, should put on its purple, and repulse with a frown, if she can, and drive back, this swarm of destroyers into the moral desert where they dwell." But there is one thing that is now tolerably clear to all who study the hidden tendencies of the times, and that is, "*That it was not because of the much-talked-of misgovernment, which was little felt by the majority of the people at large, that the late disastrous revolution took place in Europe,*" but "*because the religion of the Continent, both in Protestant and Catholic countries, was insufficient to arm the reason and guard the heart from the sophisms of the Socialist.*" *

* Quarterly Review.

The same journal, after admitting that the Prussians are, next to the Swedes, the best-instructed people in Europe, justly remarks, that, "an increase of knowledge will not teach morality; the humblest peasant often understands his duties and his rights, when he may not have language to express his feelings; his religious progress is the secret of his forbearance and of his patient endurance of the ills he is too frequently exposed to." Indeed the fact is now confirmed by ample experience that in a country whose population are, to some extent leavened with the knowledge of the Gospel, that progressive stability which is hardly secured to other nations by their armies and their laws, becomes a natural result of social life. Under such circumstances it would appear that the best remedy for the present crisis should be a religious one. This disordered and painful cry of the people, is in part, only the expression of a great moral want, and as long as this moral want remains un-

.

satisfied, we may safely predict that the angry workings of the human heart will not be calmed, nor the mutinous discontent of the people taken away. In such times of war and conflict in the spiritual world as the present, we may be certain that the people are never really indifferent in matters relating to religion : if they have not a lively faith they will have a lively unfaith ; and “ in despairing of those hopes and habits which look to futurity in another life, they will build up for themselves something in lieu, based on the prosperity and perfectibility of this life ; in other words, in ceasing to become Christians they will become Communists.” The natural position of mankind as described in the Holy Scriptures, is not that of a continued change between disease and health, but a continued diseased state ; and as Erasmus truly said, “ Sic sculptus est hominis animus ut longe magis fucis quam veris capiatur.” In order therefore to be brought to recovery, he must

be made conscious of his malady, and a partaker of the remedy which God has provided for him in the Gospel, a remedy adapted to all the spiritual wants of men, and calculated to afford them every needful amount of information, counsel, and inward strength, and which, in those countries where it is extensively circulated, has caused the ignorance and servitude of man to be no longer known in their darkest form ; and without which, a contented and prosperous state of society cannot be produced on earth. If then there is but one remedy for the present crisis, and that remedy is not resorted to ; is it to be wondered at, that in such a day of visitation as the present, " Judgment should be beginning at the house of God ?" Is it to be wondered at that the people, long kept in darkness, and cheated of the bread of life, should be attempting to bring about by evil means, a new order of society, which in another and a better sense it ought to be the privilege of the Church of Christ to

institute, under, as we hope, a more general outpouring of the Holy Spirit, with probably the removal by Divine judgment of all those things which are lets or hindrances to the progress of the Gospel throughout the world. For as we know that Christianity must ultimately prevail, and as we consider the distant age of the world in which we are living, and the occasional signs and omens of a better state of things, remembering also that man's extremity is generally God's opportunity—we may still hope that out of this very chaos an improved state of things may come, that out of this corruption God shall be pleased, in His own way and time, to cause to spring up the quickening germ of life.

II.

THE BEST GROUNDWORK OF A FIRM AND HAPPY STATE OF SOCIETY.

It appears, from late events on the Continent, that great things may be brought about by the most insignificant means : a crowd of turbulent democrats and some hundreds of enthusiastic students were sufficient to accomplish the overthrow of a dynasty. As the subversive power was so insignificant, it is now thought by many that the danger was more imaginary than real. But the peril of the times consists more in what lay beneath the surface of the devastating wave, than in the superficial crowd who floated upon the crest of it. The danger lies in the general disregard of law and authority, divine and human, which has taken

possession of the minds of the people ; and in the fact that subversive ideas work their way in silence, generally beyond the ken of the ruling powers and authorities,* like water filtering through the clefts of the rocks, and detaching them from the mountains on which they rest. It is not a little singular that, in such a time as this, when crime is on the increase, and the animal propensities in man are shooting forth with increased energy, various governments should be relaxing the reins of justice, and doing away with the punishment of crime by death. The untimely wisdom of this proceeding is manifest by the fact, that in those countries which, through bitter experience, have been awakened to a sense of their true condition, martial law (which is punishment of trans-

* George Herwegh, the democrat, had some knowledge of the hidden tendencies of the times, when, ten years ago, he published a letter to the King of Prussia, in which he said, "That modern European governments, instead of noticing what was passing around them in the depths of human nature, were merely fighting with the wind and the froth that played upon its surface."

gression by death in a wholesale way) is now becoming the last arbitrator between the government and the people ; all other law being dissolved in order to escape anarchy. But martial law is not restorative, or remedial ; it but sustains life under the oppressive stillness which generally precedes the earthquake, but affords no security against some fresh outbreak of volcanic agency. When the Rationalist and the Deist are training up the rising generation to abnegate the idea of a Personal God, to regard all religion as a needless restraint, and immortality as a fiction ; when the success and ubiquity of their efforts is manifested by the fact that one city gives the impulse that sets the rest of Europe in motion, it is evident that a permanent cure is not to be effected by repressive measures alone. The apostles of " Humanismus " and Socialism have displayed what they can do ; and in order to counteract their efforts, it is thought advisable to endeavour to bring back former

times, to commit the present generation to a well-known spiritual guardian, who will instil superstitious fear, and provide swaddling-clothes for their minds as well as for their bodies ; confining them to that state of mental development, which will make it easy for arbitrary governments to rule them. But is not this like attempting to recal the early dawn, when the sun is already going down in the west ?

A great change has already taken place in the mind of Europe ; the general current of ideas, and the tendencies of the times are altered also. “ Europe’s great land-marks,” observes a modern eye-witness of the state of things, “ are of course unchanged : the tourist of this day traverses the same plains and mountains, which were traversed by the tourist of half a century ago ; but this is all that remains of the Europe of former days. The influences at work in European society, the opinions which are beginning to prevail, which have indeed now all but

gained the ascendancy, are of a character altogether new." And again, "How few great changes the ages that intervened between the irruption of the barbarous nations and the breaking out of the French Revolution were productive of! Across the stage of history there moved, age after age, the same stately pageants, in which kings and churchmen were conspicuously visible, while the people were lost in a confused and dimly seen mass." "The former had only to issue their commands, and the service, however difficult, was executed without a murmur; and the latter had but to enunciate their dogma, and, however absurd and monstrous, it was received without a moment's inquiry and doubt. The one wielded a supreme empire over the bodies of men, the other as supreme an empire over their minds. But all this seems nearly at an end in Europe now, or if not yet wholly at an end, seems likely to become so." If then the minds of men have already been so wildly

emancipated as this, what power shall avail to bring them back into subjection to arbitrary ecclesiastical authority and law ; or what shall induce them to resist present allurements, and cause them to have due respect for human law and authority ? To do this upon a foundation that cannot be moved, there is no charm but to instil respect for the holy Law of God ; which as a rule of life, is binding upon all men, and the only abiding ground-work of all order, firmness, and happiness in society. But as long as the Word of God is made a contraband commodity in the vulgar tongue, or clouded over with human traditions, or nullified by philosophy ; so long will the people probably remain a prey to every new Satanic device, and be carried away by every new maniacal movement. It is indeed true, we occasionally find even in the Sceptic and the Infidel, a certain noble rectitude of conduct, an outward respect for the Law of God, so apparent as to win the approbation

of men, and to induce them to say; Behold! an upright man, to whom hypocrisy and deceit are unknown. But what is the main-spring of the conduct of such men?—is it the love of God and good-will to man? No! it is the love of self and self-interest, that actuates them; they are manifest gainers by their conduct, they see that the world pays a certain respect to virtue, and they put a curb upon themselves, in order to secure the approbation of the world. But of what avail is their outward rectitude, when the thought that animates them is selfish and vain. We see man's altered countenance toward God, his dislike of immediate intercourse with him; instead of serving God with a willing and a grateful heart, we see distrust, suspicion, and fear; the good will, the constant desire to please is wanting; and this must be restored; the will of the Lawgiver must become the will of the subject; not through fear, but love, and then the obedience of the subject

will be more perfect, and more acceptable to him that imposed it. Now it is evident, even from the unconscious testimony of infidels, that the law of God is of a tendency most honourable to him, and beneficial to man. If it be not, therefore, loved and obeyed, the evil is not in the Law, but in the heart of man, to whose corrupted heart a Law so pure and perfect is no longer spiritually acceptable. So pure is the Law, that if we could really keep it, in spirit and in truth, it would bring us to everlasting life ; but as we cannot do so, it condemns us unto death ; but yet, it has a good object in view, it teaches us to know ourselves and to know God also, it is the great mirror to which we must go, to find out our own lost and sinful state. And when properly known it is an unfailing conductor to Christ, who, notwithstanding ignominy and disgrace, grief, and sorrow, endured the curse of the Law for us, and took away the condemnation of it.

If therefore we despise the Law, we despise the Gospel also, for the Law brings us to the Gospel, and the Gospel is made precious to us through the Law.* And now the heart of the redeemed believer is filled with gratitude and love, and well knowing that although Christ has made him free from the curse and condemnation of the Law, he has not thereby made him free from the observance of it; he takes it as his rule of life, and it becomes his object and aim to live to the glory of God and the enduring welfare of others. Men who entertain such views of the Law of God, must be good and useful members of society, not driven to and fro of blind movement, not contentious, or

* How different are the views of Rosmini on the testimony of Scripture to those of the so-called modern Reformers of Germany. Rosmini calls the Scriptures, "L'unico testo dell'istruzione popolare ad ecclesiastica." And again, "Questa Scrittura, che è veramente il libro del genere umano, il libro, la scrittura per antonomasia." "In quel libro l'eterna verità parla in tutti que' modi, a cui si piega l'umana loquela: ora narra, ora ammaestra, ora sentenzaia, ora canta; la dottrina vi è così semplice, che l'idiota la crede, fatta a posta per se; e così sublime, che il dotto dispera di trovarci fondo."

full of mutinous discontent, but diligent and peaceful, "and ready to every good work." * But is the Law in this sense generally known and believed in ; is it in this sense to any extent engraven on the hearts of the people ? We believe not. We shall here conclude with the testimony of an able writer, who dwelt many years on the Continent, and is in every way capable of forming a decided opinion on the subject. "The only source whence the majority of laymen can form an independent and reasonable opinion on matters of religion, is the Bible. The Romanist says it is unintelligible without the Church. The Rationalist, that it cannot be understood without theology ; and

* It is satisfactory to know that Rosmini's evangelic views are entertained by many of the clergy in northern Italy. A literary warfare has quite lately been carried on between the Jesuit Ballerini on the one side, and Rosmini and other Italian priests on the other, in which Rosmini and his numerous defenders are accused of Jansenism. The public papers at last became the platform of conflict, until Father Ballerini received notice from the "Santo Uffizio," to give up the controversy for the present.

adds, that even if it could, it is no authority. The laity must therefore submit to authority on one side or the other, or give themselves over to unbelief or worldliness, or both. Both equally lead to spiritual bondage." And then in a few impressive words, which penetrate far into the secret of the present state of Europe, he adds : " The Gentile mind is weary of the scriptural manna, it nauseates the instruction of Jewish apostles and prophets—longs for and endeavours to attain to its old heathen liberty." * But although the minds of men are tempest-shaken and rebellious, God may have still in store the means to bring them to submission and obedience. The conscience of nations as well as of individuals may require to be steeped in sorrow, that life may spring out of death, reformation and revival out of declension and decay. " When thy judgments are in the earth," saith the sacred word, " the inhabit-

* " Thoughts on Rationalism," by Dr. M'Caul.

ants of the world will learn righteousness.”
And these words may perhaps be applicable
to events which may, ere long, be unrolled
before the eye of the speculator and watch-
ful contemplatist of the times.

III.

LIBERTY UNDER THE LAW, THE GOSPEL, AND THE SO-CALLED "CHURCH OF THE NEW ERA."

It appears from the Scriptures that the whole ancient world, previous to the advent of Christ, was in a state of spiritual minority and spiritual bondage. And as a child, in order to comprehend invisible things, must have pictures and images and visible things presented to its view, so, in the worship of the ancients, visible imagery of divine things was always a predominant part of worship. The whole system of heathen worship, was penetrated throughout with visible things in worshipping God. And thus Minucius Felix, in the dialogue entitled "Octavius," said to have been written in the reign of Alexander

Severus, depreciates Christianity on account of its deficiency in this very respect. "*Nul-las aras habent, nulla templa, nulla nota simulacra.*" It appears that the Galatians, although brought, as it were, within reach of the age of spiritual manhood in Christ, preferred to remain in a state of spiritual minority or "bondage under the elements of the world." And as it is written, that "the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, although he be Lord of all;"—and as from the servant or slave, all freedom is taken away, and he can only carry into effect that which his master commands; so Paul tells us the Jews were "in bondage under the elements of the world;" and if the Jews were under this bondage, how much more so were the heathen? how much more so were the latter in bondage to the evil inclinations which sway within, and to the powers of evil under which mankind are kept in subjection from without. We know that man was not originally appointed

to "bondage under the elements of the world," he was to delight in communion with God, and to be a brother amongst brethren;—but this order has now been reversed, he is now become in a certain sense not only the slave of nature, for by the sweat of his brow, and by much toil and anxiety, he is enabled to provide for immediate and future wants, but also the slave of sin. And instead of walking hand in hand with his brother and neighbour on his earthly pilgrimage, he seeks to domineer and rule over him, and to bring him into subjection. Widely different, however, was the position of Heathenism from that of Mosaic Judaism. To the Heathen no written law was given; the only law which they had to guide them was, the unwritten law of the conscience; but the conscience is an imperfect monitor, and is easily deprived of its power of warning faithfully. So the Heathen nations, instead of using visible things in the worship of their Gods as symbols and representatives of heavenly things, soon learned

to worship the visible things themselves ; and fell into the greatest spiritual bondage and depravity. God “gave them up to uncleanness through the lust of their own hearts ;” some of them even sank into cannibalism, and the grossest superstition and bondage, under the elements of the world. The Jews on the other hand, had the written law that brings to the knowledge of sin, the beneficent word that promised peace to the repentant ; yet they were in a state of spiritual childhood and training under the law, their obedience to which was compulsory. But since, through their impenitence and unbelief, the law has failed to bring them to Him whom they ultimately rejected, it has become their enemy ; for to attain to happiness through the law it must be obeyed, and this they do not even in word and deed, still less in spirit, and still less in love, which is the fulfilment of the law. Yet so wonderfully was the Mosaic system arranged and ordained of God, that the worldly ele-

ments could only serve for that purpose to which they were appointed ; they could not easily be made accessory to idolatry. And thus, whilst the Heathen nations wandered far from happiness and from God, and fell into the greatest misery, Israel remained, as it were, nearer home, but under firm tuition in obedience to the law of spiritual childhood. They nevertheless became hard of heart, and at last wilfully rejected their appointed Saviour, and the offered mercies of God through him. And, God knows ! they have found no rest for the soles of their feet from that day to this, they have wandered far and wide, and searched every corner of the habitable globe, to see, if haply there, their long-lost Messiah was to be found, and have not found him : for until “ they acknowledge their offence, and seek his face,” they shall search for him in vain.

Thus mankind were not to be delivered from bondage under the elements of the world, either through exclusion from the law,

or through compulsory obedience to it. They were still in a state of spiritual childhood and bondage. And in this state they must have remained for ever, if God had not been pleased to send his Son from heaven, to take the prey from the mighty, and to set the captive free. For as the pardon of sin, and justification, come through the faith of Christ, and not through the observance of the law, or any indwelling and inherent righteousness of our own ;* we should have remained for ever in our sins, if Christ had not come to open a way of escape and deliverance from bondage and death. No wonder, therefore, he was long desired, and long expected, by "the prison-

* If the Jews under the Mosaic Law were in bondage under the elements of the world ; what are they under Rabbinism with its 613 precepts entering into all the minutiae of life ? And into what bondage is the Romanist fallen, when like the Jew, he seeks for justification through an inherent righteousness of his own ; and when, as appears from the Exercises of Loyola by Wiseman, "No Roman Catholic could dare to be without a spiritual director, a man to direct him in every thing, in every thought, word, and action, and in every thing pertaining to him."

ers of hope," under the dispensation of the law. No wonder that from cycle to cycle, and from century to century, they should say, He will come ! He will come, to set the captive free ; and make atonement for sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness. And He is come ! and now the faithful follower of Christ stands no longer under a schoolmaster as did the Mosaic Jew, neither does he live under a law of compulsory obedience like a child in its minority ; but supported and strengthened of the Spirit of God, he is able to walk of himself, and to serve God with a grateful and loving heart, as becometh one who hath been delivered from great servitude. Not through a slavish fear or mercenary hope of reward does he serve God now ; he renders no timid and compulsory obedience to the law of God ; it is written in his heart, and it is his delight to obey it. He needs no visible daily sacrifice, no visible thank-offering and peace-offering, for by faith he continually beholds

the sacrifice of Christ once made for sins, and this is his strength and comfort in life. He is, moreover, no longer kept in bondage under the powers of nature, he is in one sense above them, for even should he fall into want and necessity, he is still rich ; he has a treasure beyond the reach of corruption and decay ; and even should bodily disease and suffering come over him, he still lives in the enjoyment of a consolation from which no tribulation can separate him. And although not free from sin, he is not led captive of it, it does not reign over him, and by the help of the grace of God he is enabled to resist it, and overcome it. Neither does he now desire to rule over his brother and neighbour, and to bring him into subjection ; but rather to alleviate his sorrows, and to impart unto him that peace which he himself possesses.

Such is the bondage of Heathenism and Mosaism, compared with the liberty of the truly free in Christ. But a new era has

arrived, and a new church, so called, has sprung up in Europe. Two cycles of fifty years have scarcely passed away since the great apostle of this new era said of his own countrymen, and of the Germans, "that they did not dare to think," and of the Italians "that they were afraid to think," "whilst the English, who had their wings unclipt, flew up to heaven." But now these nations have learned to think, and the result has been, that "they who in former times were too subservient to authority, now begin to refuse to obey the authority at all ; they who in former times were ready to believe too much, are now about to make amends by believing nothing. If we, for instance, for a moment confine our view to Germany ; we know that the Germans, especially the middle classes, have long been celebrated as a sincere, a loyal, and a reverential people, who love truth and honesty, and are naturally disposed to respect the authority due to rank and power. This

habit of reverence for authority is now almost crushed. And with reference to religious faith and principle. We are told by a well-known modern German divine, that, from the year 1836, and especially since 1840, the Infidel and Antichristian spirit has made a progress among us which has caused the soul of every God-fearing man to tremble within him, with the presentiment of that judgment of God which must be the veritable result. Every such heart is filled with the sentiment of the Prophet, "Why is my soul so full of woe? my heart beats within me, and I have no peace, for my soul hears the trumpet-blast, the battle and the death-cry; the land is desolated, and suddenly is my tent overthrown. For he in whom we live and move and have our being, is to our people more and more a stranger." And again, "Almost all the important vibrations of public life, all the national movements in Germany, are only different vibrations of

the theme, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' " * And again the result has been sedition and revolt upon a scale hitherto unknown, a licentiousness, and bondage under the elements of the world, exceeding that into which nations fall, who are under the influence of the grossest superstition. "To arouse to exertion by the language of virtue, and to direct it to the purposes of lawlessness and vice," this seems to be the great object and leading aim of

* Kirchenzeitung, January 1849. Professor Hengstenberg alludes here, I conclude, to the middle classes in the cities and large towns of Prussia. For amongst the rural population, infidelity is not so rampant; but notwithstanding that Prussia is now the great modern storehouse of scientific infidelity; I know from personal observation, that there are in every province, some faithful men amongst the clergy; and in some provinces, as in Pomerania, and the Rhine, a considerable number of faithful men. I was lately very glad to hear from a deputation of Prussian clergymen who were on their way to Palestine, that not many of the rising generation of the clergy are decided and rampant Rationalists. Indeed an effectual, though partial religious revival, is quite compatible with general religious declension; for we are told that it is "when the enemy comes in like a flood, that the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

the " Church of the new era." The liberty it produces is virtually servitude to lust and passion, for as spiritual liberty is endangered when it has to pass under the yoke of a superstitious faith ; much more so is it endangered where it breaks loose from all restraint, where it has no burden to bear, for in this case it becomes the wild lawless wilfulness of turbulent men ; whereby the welfare of society is endangered, and all needful order and authority set at nought. There is one thing which the " Church of the new era " leaves entirely untouched, and that is, the corrupted heart of man, every thing else is to be overturned and set in motion but the regnant dominion of sin within. It abnegates the fall of man, and advocates the perfection of human nature by human efforts, and by the diffusion of philanthropic sentiments. It offers no certain hope of future life ; it comforts no afflicted heart ; it supplies no remedy for a wounded spirit, neither can it yield any-

thing to support the drooping head of man in sorrow or in death. But again, it may be asked, Is it not because faith in Christ, and the love of him in the heart, had almost disappeared from amongst various Christian communities and nations,—that the evil genius of the age, like the evil spirit mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, has thus easily been permitted to leap, as it were, upon them, and overcome and devastate them. Truth is not to be driven out of the hearts by infidel arguments, or by force ; but when truth is very generally unknown, when there is intellectual cultivation with moral neglect, when the understanding is enlightened and the mind wildly emancipated from the yoke of superstition ; then, we have lately seen what infidelity can do : and how even now it produces an indistinct fearful looking forward to the future, similar to that described by Tacitus : “ Non tumultus, non quies, sed quale magni metus, et magnæ iræ sententiam.”

IV.

THE MODERN SCEPTIC AND THE CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATING NATURE.

It is observable that some individuals are gifted with much greater capacity to enjoy the beauties of nature than others : every leisure hour and every day of freedom from business, is devoted by some, to the exploration and enjoyment of the beauties of nature ; whilst others are content to run their career in life in the heart of some crowded city, shut up within close walls, over which they do not venture to peep.

This capacity to enjoy the beauties of nature is certainly a gift which dignifies the individual that possesses it ; but it is not religion, nor even a sure stepping-stone to religion. And yet how frequent is the

assertion, that the best revelation we can have of God is the revelation of himself in nature:—That God is to be seen in the smiling landscape of fields and woods, and in the splendour of the starry heavens, in the little songster of the grove and in the soaring eagle ; and that there is no temple in which to worship God equal to the temple of nature : And again, how frequent is the speech that “ the three pure sources of Divine revelation are—nature, the light of reason, and the history of mankind.” * But when these and similar assertions are properly examined it will generally be found that the objects of the advocates of them is to make use of God’s testimony of himself in nature, as the means whereby to drive out of the world God’s higher and more glorious testimony of himself in revelation. But what nature cannot do for us, that re-

* That Infidelity and Deism are not confined to Northern Germany, may be seen by a journal published at Gratz, in the heart of Austria, called “ Das Uhrchristenthum.”

velation does for us, it brings us first to know happiness and God, and then gives fresh interest to the beauties of nature. It teaches us to know the true object and destiny of the planet on which we dwell ; and this when truly known as being connected with our deepest interests—past, present, and to come, renders nature in our eyes more beautiful and glorious and interesting than before. If indeed it was possible to arrive at happiness through the study of nature, what prospect should we have of ever attaining to it. Our knowledge is necessarily limited, and must ever be limited ; and when we attempt to penetrate beyond the outward appearance of things, to their inner life, and their relationship to God, we stumble upon wonders which are beyond our reach and comprehension. The most learned of all the students of nature, cannot explain unto us the secret of the original springing into life of the smallest insect, or of the origin of the smallest blade of grass. If

left alone to the light of reason and nature, how little do we know of what we are, and have around us ; how little of what we shall be. The "heavens" indeed "declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work ;" but they give only faint glimpses of the objects of God in creation, of a resurrection, and of a world beyond the grave. How little the wisest nations of antiquity knew of the objects of God in creation, Paul tells us, when he said, that "in professing themselves to be wise they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things." It is to eyes that cannot see, and hearts that cannot feel, that the "heavens declare the glory of God," unless the understanding heart and the enlightened eye hath been first given to those, whose desire is "from nature to look up to nature's God." This is manifestly displayed in the wisdom of vari-

ous modern philosophers, who, after having sacrificed the best of their days in searching into the mysteries of nature, have come to the conclusion that the world is nothing but a living ball, an immense and unknown living thing, self-existent, ever bringing forth fresh generations of men and animals, and absorbing them into its life-devouring surface again. And forgetful, that there is nothing divine in nature further than in its being the work of a Divine Artificer, they have attributed to nature the power and the glory which is due only to God. For well has it been said, that although "the laws of nature are created and adapted to sustain the existence, the growth, and the reproduction of all vegetable and animal life, there is no instance upon record, in the history of the world, of these laws ever having created any new creature, or that they had commenced, or even half-commenced, the formation of any organized being from the beginning of its existence."*

* "Antidote to Atheism," by M. Watt, Esq.

Now, to see God in the works of his hands, in something of that joyful and refreshing light, in which our great progenitor was accustomed to see them, ere his spiritual eye was blinded, his heart corrupted, and his will perverted by his disobedience to the law and to the command of God, we must through faith in Christ, the second Adam, have our spiritual eye enlightened to comprehend the wonders of God in revelation and in redemption, ere we can also properly comprehend the wonders of God in creation. And then we shall see and believe that this earthly ball, whose surface is the arena of our joys and of our sorrows, is something more than a great cemetery, under whose verdant turf our ashes must be laid. It is the platform on which the battle of man's redemption was fought, the honored dwelling-place of men redeemed of God ; and above all, the hall of entrance to a higher world. And being such to the Christian, then may he well take deep in-

terest in all pertaining to it, then may he well admire it, for here it is that, in one sense of the word, his eternal life is begun. Without redemption man would be an outcast without a home; and without revelation, the earth would be a gloomy valley, into which no ray of hope was seen to enter; but with these, all things are seen to be adapted one to another; nothing is seen to be without an object—and a new glory seems to be shed over the beauties of nature. The creation and preservation of the world proclaim to us in great things as well as small, the power and the wisdom of God, but in the redemption of mankind to eternal life by the sacrifice of Christ, is the love and goodness of God fully developed. God is the God of life and not of death; it is to live that he hath created us, and not to die eternally; and if the wonders of God in creation are worthy to be admired, much more are they when considered in connection with his wonderful

goodness in the redemption and recovery of a fallen world. And he who does not know experimentally, through faith in Christ, the goodness of God in redemption, cannot, as he ought, know the goodness of God in the creation and preservation of the world. Faith in revelation makes clear to us our true position in relationship to the world, and its true position in relation to mankind. In Christ we see the broken band between divinity and humanity, between God and man, restored ; that which was separate is now united ; that which was broken apart is bound up again. From Adam, who permitted himself to be robbed of the heavenly image or likeness, came sin and death into the world. From Christ, the second Adam, who both possessed and retained in the midst of temptation the heavenly image and likeness, came the victory over sin and death ; the heavenly power to serve God and obey him, which was lost through the first Adam, is given back to us

through the second ; the malignant enemies of our race who overcame, have been overcome—and human nature regenerated, purified and sanctified, goes on from one stage of victory to another, until the victory is complete. When seen in this light, the world no longer preaches to the Christian of wrath and severity of God, and of the fearfulness of disobeying him ; but as the most highly honoured of created orbs, it preaches of mercy, goodness, and love. The fatherly love and goodness of God is manifest even in this, in that he condemned sin, and at the same time found a way to redeem the sinner, in making “him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” The sin of man brings the Prince of life to the cross and to the grave, and that cross becomes the victory over the world, and the highway to a state of happiness more complete than that of Adam in Paradise. And thus that very human nature which was polluted in Para-

dise, and crushed on earth, is restored again, and ultimately raised to the throne of God in heaven. No wonder therefore that faith makes nature more beautiful and worthy of admiration in the sight of the Christian, and his earthly home more dear to him. The earth becomes as it were a land of promise, since the footsteps of our blessed Saviour trod upon it, and when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart of man by the Holy Spirit, so as to enable him to comprehend the goodness of God in redemption, as well as the glory and greatness of God in creation. But it is moreover as being the hall of entrance to a higher world, that the earth is also especially interesting to the Christian. For if we be indeed Christ's disciples, if we are conscious of having followed our Saviour in the midst of an ungodly world, we know that we "have a home awaiting us, eternal in the heavens." And although storm and sunshine, and changing seasons, speak throughout of variable-

ness and decay : yet Christ we know, never changes ; and through him who liveth for ever, we shall also live : and in this light, the earth which is to the infidel nothing but a beautifully-adorned sepulchre, is to the Christian nothing but the vestibule of heaven, the entrance-hall to the holy place itself. Well, therefore, may redeemed sinners admire the beauties of their earthly home, and say ; “ If the earthly dwelling-place of the redeemed be so much worthy of admiration, what shall the heavenly Canaan beyond it be ? If the hall of entrance be so beautiful and glorious, what shall the “ new heavens and the new earth ” be, “ wherein dwelleth righteousness,” or thus otherwise, in the words of the Christian poet, they may say,

O God ! oh good beyond compare !
 If thus Thy meaner works are fair,
 If thus Thy glories gild the span
 Of ruined earth, and sinful man ;
 How glorious shall those mansions be
 Where Thy redeemed shall dwell with Thee ?

V.

THE WONDERS OF THE LAW, HOW DECIPHERED BY THE RATIONALIST AND BY THE CHRISTIAN.

THE Infidel and the Rationalist do not hesitate to appeal to the Holy Scriptures, as well as the believing Christian. Both parties seek to draw out arguments in defence of their cause from the same spiritual treasury ; but the medium through which they seek to apprehend or elaborate the meaning of scripture is widely different, and the object they have in view is more different still. In the perusal of Scripture the faithful Christian seeks for consolation and guidance in the midst of the trials and vicissitudes of life ; he seeks for enlargement of mind, and the attainment of the knowledge that maketh him wise unto salvation. The

Infidel, on the other hand, in perusing the Scriptures, either seeks to lay in a store of additional knowledge wherewith to make a display in the eyes of men ; or else he reads them with the view of substituting in their place a gospel of his own, whereby the rising generation shall be thoroughly emancipated from the yoke of moral principles and religious belief. And in their endeavours to penetrate into the hidden meaning of the Word of God, and to unravel the mysteries contained in it, the same divergence is observable. Here the Infidel and the Rationalist admit only the omnipotence of human reason, as fully able to clear away all difficulties, and explain all the deep things contained in the Scriptures of truth ; whilst the Christian seeks to have his spiritual eye enlightened, and his understanding enlarged, as being needful prerequisites to the right comprehension of the " Wonders of the Law." We see this truth developed in the prayer of the Psalmist, " Open thou mine

eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," and believe the spiritual enlightenment here mentioned to be needful, not only on account of the natural imperfection of human reason, but also on account of the unfathomable depths of the wisdom of God, and the blessings attainable through even an imperfect acquaintance with the "wondrous things" contained in his Law. For although gifted with marvellous powers of grasping and comprehending earthly things, and of bringing them into subjection to the mind—although capable of attaining to a certain knowledge of God by his own unaided efforts—man cannot unaided, with his darkened eye and withered heart, savingly apprehend and appreciate the life-giving truths contained in the Word of God. The Rationalist and the Infidel philosopher, desirous of making the word of God comprehensible to their own minds, seek therefore to strip it of all its mysteries, but in so doing, they only gratify a restless

curiosity, they do not find the aliment which gives life to the soul. And disappointed in this, they take revenge by seeking to engraft upon the Scriptures their own ideas and philosophy, and thereby to develop some new gospel wherewith to regenerate mankind. And thus during the last half-century new systems of religious philosophy, all having the same result, have been springing up and succeeding each other in some countries as rapidly as new forms of government in others, where the people are most changeable in politics, and most ignorant of the art of governing themselves.

“When the philosophy of the eighteenth century was replaced in the world by that of Germany, it might have been thought that that which had been destroyed by Voltaire, was about to be re-established by Kant and Goëthe. Was it possible that their spiritualism should end in the same result as his sensualism? Surely not. Whoever had asserted it, would have been

thought insane. How many persons flattered themselves with the idea that Christianity was about to be completely re-established by the new system of metaphysics! Philosophy itself seemed to partake of the illusion, and firmly to believe that she had made her peace with real religion." Whereas results have proved that "she only shifted the quarrel to fresh ground." * And here again it has been clearly shown that Revelation in all ages, when travelled over by the natural reason, "is only a field of contradictions and problems." For "in vain has man in his search for the supreme good, called into exercise his reason, his imagination, his heart, and his conscience; in vain has he done all that it is possible for man to do; everywhere in his systems there appear chasms wide and deep."† And no wonder, for he seeks to attain to that which is far beyond his unaided reach. "For the man who

* E. Quinet on the state of Christianity in Germany.

† *Discours sur quelques Sujets Religieuse*, par A. Vinet, D.D. ♣

pretends to accomplish by his own power," continues the same author, "the work of his salvation, must first pardon and then regenerate himself. It is necessary that he should efface the very last vestige of all his former sins ; that is to say, that he should do what cannot be done." In short, without an enlightened eye and meek and inquiring spirit, he cannot penetrate into the sanctuary of revealed things, nor go by faith within the veil. And well was it said, by a pious prelate of the Church of Rome, who although he lived and died in communion with that Church, preached for many years the doctrines of faith in Bavaria, that "there is a childish simplicity that conquers heaven ; and a clever intellectuality that digs it own grave deep in hell."*

* I allude to Bishop Sailer of Ratisbon, who in the previous century preached the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ ; and was supported in this by Martin Boos, Fenneberg and others, who sowed the good seed so extensively in Bavaria, that even to this day there is a remnant of faithful witnesses to Christ in that section of the Church of Rome.

Such heaven-conquering simplicity is displayed by the Psalmist in the previously-mentioned prayer. For what was this but a free and open confession of his own natural blindness in spiritual things, of his own incapacity to fathom them, and of his need to have the eye of his understanding enlightened, in order to enable him to comprehend the wonders of the law. For indeed, as the eye of man contains no inherent light, but is only the medium for the transmission of light ; so is reason, in one sense, but the eye of the soul, and not even like the bodily eye, an unimpaired medium for the reception and transmission of light, but so darkened and impaired by sin, that it cannot rightly receive and comprehend the light until it has undergone a preparatory process of sanctification and cure. But the prayer of the Psalmist is a needful pre-requisite to the right understanding of Holy Scriptures, on account of the deep things and the marvels which are therein contained. For how

far above the reach of unassisted reason is the history of creation ; what more marvellous than the position of our first parents in Paradise ; their subsequent fall and changed nature. What a stumbling-block to the unsanctified intellect of man, is the history of the deluge ; and the destruction of the human race all but eight souls. And again, the history of the confusion of tongues, and of that mysterious people whose pilgrimage on earth, from the call of Abraham to the present day, has been one continued wonder. But most marvellous, and most beyond the reach of unaided human reason, is the history of the "World-redeemer, who was to begin life as a child, and yet to be without beginning of days : to come down from heaven, and yet to be born in Bethlehem : to be the Prince of life, and yet condemned to die : to be the King of kings, and yet suspended upon a tree." And that in his name, and through faith in his name, human nature, long separated from happiness and from

God, may now be re-united to the shores of heaven. But although these and many others of the "wondrous things" revealed in the word of God, are to this day a stumbling-block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Gentiles, to those to whom they are revealed by the Spirit of God, they are the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation. The great apostle of the Gentiles tells us, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." But, however poor and blind he may be, he has but to learn to stretch his withered hands to heaven ; for it is written, "What man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone ? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent ? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him." ·

But lastly, the importance of this prayer, as a prerequisite to the right knowledge of Scripture, is evident by reason of the blessings that are attainable by this simple conditional means. It is indeed true, these blessings are chiefly spiritual, and must be experienced to be known and valued ; they are such as can calm the troubled spirit, lift up the drooping head, console the anguished heart, and make the dull eye sparkle with the hope of heaven. But they are not the less real, because they cannot be weighed in the balance, or clasped with the hand, or measured with the natural eye. And what are they to those that are in store, which “ eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, but which God hath prepared for them that love him.” If therefore the reason of man is so imperfect, the wonders contained in the word of God so marvellous, the blessings attainable by the knowledge of them so great ; blessed are they who have learned

the secret of unlocking the treasure-book by such simple conditional means as this, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law !"

VI.

LIGHT, WHAT IT IS, AND HOW APPROPRIATED.

LIGHT in relationship to improvements made in the outward things that concern life, is a very different thing from light in relationship to our duties towards each other, and towards God. In the knowledge of the former, great advances have been made during the present century ; whilst with greater advantages for the propagation of religious light, than any previous age perhaps ever possessed ; religion seems, at least in central Christendom, to be in a state of decadence and decay. So variable is the opinion of the world on the subject of light, that what would be considered light in one age, would be considered darkness in ano-

ther ; but light in the sense above referred to, that light on which we depend for spiritual life and happiness, is not variable or subject to change. It is the same unchangeable thing which it was many centuries ago. It is stationary, when every thing else is in movement ; we cannot enlarge it, or make improvements on it, for of this light alone it has been said, " Ye shall not add unto it, neither shall ye diminish ought from it." And being unchangeable, it possesses the same capacity to satisfy all the wants of the soul, and make it happy, which it ever possessed. In the world, and in ourselves, all is subject to variableness and decay, and now, more than ever, the human mind is wearying itself to exhaustion in its love of novelty and change, and even the Christian camp itself is full of discord, incoherency, and commotion ; but in this there is light beyond ourselves, and the power of the world ; and which is not subject to change. Though all things may

change and fail, this light faileth not, and however much distraction and perplexity there may be in the world, here there is security and peace. And therefore light, in this important sense, is adhesion to that which is unchangeable. Alas ! how prone is even the faithful Christian, when adrift, as it were, in harassment and perplexity of soul, to look to something in the world, or within himself, wherein to confide. Whereas faith, when it is strong, often contradicts inward feeling, and in the absence of joyous or excited feeling ; in the midst of sorrow and depression of spirit, faith becomes our heavenly monitor, in leading us to seek for happiness in that which is unchangeable and beyond ourselves, in the unfailing word and promise of God.

But, again, in answer to the question, What is light ? it may be answered ; light is not the over-estimation of human reason, but reason properly subjected to, and sanctified by, intercourse with unchangeable

light. And here again, it seems that we require a rock on which to plant our feet, which is beyond ourselves and the world, for in none is the gift of reason less to be admired than in those who misuse this blessed gift in idolizing it, and over-estimating it. As well may we seek to invest God with human feelings and passions, as to bring down all that is written in his word to the level of human reason. For as far as God is above man, and his thoughts than our thoughts, so far is his word superior to the unaided products of human reason. For, although there may not be much in Scripture that is contrary to reason, there is certainly not a little that is above reason. Instead of attempting in our perplexity therefore, to bring down the word of God to the level of human reason, how much better would be the rule adopted by Bishop Sailer, when he resolved, that "When the little light that is within me can guide me no further, and leaves me in the dark, then

shall I follow thankfully a higher light, which has visited me in the midst of the gloom of an enlightened world.”* By such means as this, light is appropriated; for what greater darkness can there be on earth, than in the proud over-estimation of the gift of reason, to close our spiritual eye to the entrance of the only light which can make us happy and wise unto salvation. Men do not, therefore, want a new revelation to make them happy and wise, but only the proper use of, and appropriation of the light contained in that which has been given to them. Neither is there anything irrational in the reverence of the faithful Christian for the Word of God, which he knows from experience to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” He sees the improvement which has resulted to the peace

* Sailer's Sprüche.

and happiness of human society from the practice of its precepts ; and that with all the powers of evil opposed to it, it has remained unchangeable, and has passed down the current of time, vivifying a lost world on its way, from the earliest times to the present day ; and therefore no wonder that he reverences it. Now, our blessed Lord himself points out to us the knowledge of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, as the necessary preliminary to the right knowledge of the New. “ If ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words.” And it is easily seen, that the Old and New Testament is a complete and inseparable book : one pre-supposes the divine authority of the other. Paul does not hesitate to place his own writings in connected link with those of Moses and the Prophets. And notwithstanding all that has been said against the completeness of the Divine Records, those writings were scattered too far and too wide, and found their way into too

many hands to admit of the introduction of spurious matter. Neither is there any reason to doubt, but that modern Christians cite the very same words in refutation of error, which the immediate followers of the inspired writers cited in their day. For the apostles left behind them unfading records of the same things which they taught orally during their lives. "For by no other persons," we are told by Ireneus, "have we been instructed in the dispensation of salvation, than by those through whom the gospel has been delivered to us, which gospel they at first preached by word of mouth, but afterwards by God's will, handed down to us in writing, to be the foundation and pillar of our faith." * Such is the testimony of Ireneus; and ere I conclude, it may not be inapplicable to quote a few passages from a late striking letter by a modern Divine on the subject of the plenary inspiration of Holy Writ. "The

* *Adversus Hæres. Lib. 3. cap. i.*

omniscient and omnipresent God," says this writer, "has set his seal to, and so to speak, made himself answerable for whatever should be taught to the world in his name by the men who wrote the Bible." "And it is on this ground," continues he, "that we justly conclude in opposition to the Romanist (and the Rationalist) that the Apostles and Prophets alone possessed that infallibility which the Romanist absurdly claims for uninspired men :—men for whose teaching, either individually or collectively, God never made himself responsible. For how is infallibility attained? In a strict sense, infallibility requires perfect knowledge, which, God alone possessing, is properly speaking, alone and absolutely infallible. But God may communicate his own infallibility to certain men, by becoming answerable for all they should teach and write, and here Romanism must ever fail, for she cannot trace her peculiar tenets to such men, or reconcile them with what such

have actually taught. But not so the Holy Scriptures. They admit, and alone admit, of being traced up to men for whose teaching, God, without any reservation, made himself answerable. In themselves they were liable to err, as other men, but God, by marking them out by name, promising 'to lead them into all truth;' and 'shew them things to come,'—by attesting their personal teaching by miracles, and saying to them personally, 'he that heareth you, heareth me,' and above all things, by prohibiting, under the heaviest penalties, anything being added to, or taken from their writings, has adopted, marked, and recognized all that they should teach as his own words."*

When such is the perfection of Holy Scripture, is it to be wondered at that it should remain a sealed book to those who dishonour it by attempting to sit in judgment

* Letter on the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by the Rev. J. R. Cotter, Prebendary of Donoghmore.

upon it in the proud assumption of the supremacy of human reason. The light of Scripture cannot find its way into the unsubdued mind and heart, "not from any want of real clearness in the written word, but because the prejudice and the pride of man obstruct it." The arrogance of a captious understanding must be overcome, and the mistyness of a superstitious faith must be cleared away ere the light of scripture can be appropriated and lodged as a living element within the soul. Even the faithful Christian, who in occasional depression seeks for consolation in some fleshly arm, in the world, or even in past experiences and in self, must be taught the vanity of such reliances. What has he within himself that is fixed and unalterable? One day he is full of the tumult of excited feeling; if he had wings he could flee away to some happier land, the next day he is wandering in the wilderness, his peace of mind is gone, his vacillating heart is perplexed with

doubts and fears, and the happy hours of past experiences can supply no comfort to his soul. And what is the remedy? The weak eye of faith must be led away from the dust of the earth to the promise and the unchangeable word again. And as he casts the arms of faith around the promise of Scripture, in sure confidence in its unfailing truth, he receives consolation and support, he appropriates light, he plants his feet upon a rock, and in so doing he partakes of the indeciduous nature of the rock itself, and thus he learns to be "stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as he knows that his labour is not in vain in the Lord."

VII.

EXPIATION FORMERLY GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED, NOW GENERALLY DENIED.

MOSAISM, especially as having been an expiatory religion, is now considered to be nothing but a relic of a mythic age, unworthy of the faith of modern men. The first five books of the Old Testament, are looked upon as a collection of stray fragments ; Abraham and Isaac as fabulous men ; the departure from Egypt, the forty years in the desert, the seventy elders at the head of the tribes, and even the legislation on Mount Sinai, all as an incoherent series of independent poems and myths. Neither are these results which have been suddenly arrived at ; they are the fruit of long-conti-

nued thought and laborious research. "Men who commenced by rejecting Genesis, have afterwards been led to reject the Prophets, then the Apostles and Evangelists, then the Fathers, then the Councils, then the Church, then the whole collection of Sacred History, so that at last all their tradition was confined to themselves." * But whatsoever discoveries each infidel philosopher had made, however contradictory their theories, the fruits of their labours were not lost, their doubts were at last concentrated, and "the scattered fragments of scepticism formed into one bundle," by the lecturer of Tübingen, the author of the "History of the life of Jesus." † There is one thing, however, which no infidel philosopher can argue away, and that is the spirituality of

* Quinet.

† I was favored with an interview with this celebrated writer at Heilbron in Wurttemberg in 1847. The impression left upon my mind was, that he was not satisfied with his own work; he seemed to me, a spirit ill at rest, conscious of a great want, yet determined to pursue its downward course.

the religion of the Bible—the best touchstone of the Divine origin of a religion. Neither can they offer us any thing in its stead: “the field of invention in the matter of positive religions is irrevocably closed—no new worship will establish itself on earth.” “That which remained concealed from philosophers and sages, in the most brilliant periods of the human intellect, twelve poor fishermen from the lakes of Judea, quitted their nets to announce to the world. Certainly, they had not more of imagination, of reason, of heart, or of conscience than the rest of mankind; yet they put to silence the wisdom of sages, emptied the schools of philosophers, closed the gates of every temple, extinguished the fire on every altar. They exhibited to the world their crucified Master, and the world recognized in Him that which their anxious craving had for three thousand years sought in vain. A new morality, new social relations, and a new universe sprang into being,

at the voice of these poor people, ignorant of letters and of all philosophy." *

Now Mosaism being the groundwork of Christianity, and expiation the leading central doctrine of Mosaism, and sacrifice being evidently no spontaneous product of human reason—how are Rationalists to account for the fact that the most remote and barbarous nations have always had some presentiment of the necessity of it. "Observe at a glance, the religions of the nations," says the author above quoted; "enter all their temples, look upon all their altars, and you will see blood! blood! to honour the Deity." Yea! "For the sake of finding a worthy victim, man has had recourse to man himself: human blood has flowed in the temples, and the torment has not ceased; human blood has effaced nothing." Is not this because sin and sacrifice are two things that stand in mysterious connexion with each other? For sin brings with it sufferings of a

* Vinet.

two-fold description, sufferings attended with temporal and eternal consequences. The temporal consequences of sin, we can to a certain extent, alleviate or remedy ; if we have through our own improvidence and idleness reduced ourselves to poverty and distress, we may by thriftiness and care recover our ground ; if we have injured our neighbour, we may make reparation for it ; if through want of precaution or licentiousness our bodily health has been impaired, the evil may not be beyond the reach of remedy. But the eternal consequences of sin are not so easily effaced ; the burden of long accumulated guilt in the sight of God, the stings of conscience, are not ephemeral ; they may follow beyond the grave, and become as it were bound up in the life of the unrepentant for ever. The heathen sacrifices were only an indistinct acknowledgment of this truth, and a relic, although a corrupted relic, of primitive tradition. And what the heathen indistinctly knew, was

revealed by God to the first progenitors of the human race, and more distinctly revealed to us in ancient Judaism, which had its central city, and its glorious temple, where the presence and the glory of God were displayed; to this central city it was appointed that the stream of pilgrimage was to run—there expiation and atonement for sin was to be made, and many a weary pilgrim oppressed at heart, and sorrowful by reason of the burden and the guilt of sin, sought there and obtained that peace which the world cannot give. There was to be seen the altar of sacrifice, there the priesthood in holy garments, and the innocent victim whose blood was to be poured out, and the great altar therewith sprinkled as an atonement well pleasing to the God of Israel. Of whatsoever sins the Israelite was guilty, whether of the breaking of the moral law or transgression of the Levitical, in no other way could his sins be atoned for. In all the Mosaic sacrifices the doctrine of trans-

ference and substitution was proclaimed ; in them the Israelite learned to know, that in order to be redeemed from the guilt and the consequence of sin, the life of another must be given for our life,—the life of one who was of the same nature with ourselves, and yet who had not partaken of our sin. This truth was represented in long-continued typical rehearsal in the Mosaic worship. An innocent and harmless animal was there brought before the altar of sacrifice, over it confession of sin was made, and its blood was then shed as an atonement for the sins of priest and people. The penitent and believing Israelite knew very well the meaning of the ordinance, he felt that his guilt was transferred figuratively to the innocent substitute, and as he looked forward in faith to a more perfect sacrifice, he knew that his sin was atoned for, it was transferred to another, and if sought for it could not be found. He looked forward by faith to a Lamb to be slain once for all, whose

blood, vicarious in its nature because he was man, and infinite in value because he was God, should avail to wash away the guilt of all sin. But Mosaism was local and temporary ; it was confined to one people, and of limited duration. It was not to last for ever, but was to make way at last for a more perfect system, as the prophet Jeremiah amongst others tells us when he predicted that a time should come when the ark of the covenant should be no longer thought of, no longer remembered, no longer sought after.*

And the same truth which was latent in Mosaism, and exhibited there in retirement, became manifest and universally aggressive in the world-redeeming Son of God ; through whose atonement made for sin, the wall of separation between God and man has been broken down, and in whom we see how a perfect substitute can take the place of the guilty believing sinner, and

* Jer. iii. 16.

carry away his sin. And this points out to us the extent of our sin and lost condition, at the same time that it places before us in the most striking manner the mercy, the goodness, and the love of God. The work of redemption was thus taken entirely out of mortal hands ; men were shown that if they had anything to do with it they should have marred it, “ for none of them can redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.” * And it is for this very reason amongst others, the more unacceptable to the unsanctified intellect of man. Men are discontented, instead of being the more grateful ; because, as Augustine says, “ God who made us without our aid, has also saved us without our aid.” But again, as the tree is known by its fruits, so are faith in Christ as the atoning Lamb of God ; and the infidel rejection of this truth known by their results. Modern infidelity considers expiation to be fiction, and to be unnecessary. But with

* Psalm xlix. 7.

this, it considers the corrupted heart of man to be uncorrupt, self-indulgence to be reasonable gratification, pride and self-esteem to be honourable feeling, sin to be virtue ; and we have seen what fruit it produces in the world. Whereas faith in Christ, as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, produces contentment and tranquillity. It makes the quarrelsome man peaceful, the sensual man chaste, the proud man humble, the covetous man contented, and the sorrow-haunted full of peace and joy. It fills the world with evangelic missions, and sends the messengers of the Gospel to distant regions and inhospitable climes, where no infidel propagandist will venture to follow them. And thus if a choice is to be made, it will not be difficult for the humble inquirer after truth to find out, by their fruits, which is the wisdom of this world, and which is the wisdom that cometh from above.

VIII.

THE EAST AT THE BREAKING OUT OF THE ARIAN HERESY, AND THE PRESENT TIMES.

THE present state of continental Christendom, especially that portion occupied by the great Teutonic family, brings to mind the state of the East at the breaking out of the Arian heresy. "Then was heard, not only in Egypt and Palestine, but throughout the whole of the East, nothing but irreverend disputes upon the most sacred topics ; it was not merely the ecclesiastic that took part in them, but the most unenlightened of the people, men sitting in the market-places with their wares, shopkeepers behind their counters, sempstresses and tailors, all made the mysteries, into which not even

angels presume to look, the theme of their ignorant conjectures, and often of their profane jesting."* The primary result was somewhat similar in both cases; "The Arian heresy weakened the faith, and damped the hopes of multitudes who had before been supported through the deepest trials; it taught man to place an impious confidence in his own reasoning powers, in opposition to the revealed will of God." And, again, in both cases; "the petty stream which had its source in the vanity or presumption of an individual, had swollen as it proceeded to a torrent which threatened to

* In the book on "Catholicism and Italian democracy," from which I have already quoted, there are passages demonstrative that this irreligious zeal and love of disputation are not confined to Germany; the author says in p. 69, "La corruzione, e la incredulita sono penetrate dappertutto: nello studio del letterato, nelle aule della universita, nello banco del mercante, e nelle officine dell' artista: nella casa del ricco, e in quella del povero, nella citta e nelle campagne: vi sono penetrate per mezzo dei libelli e giornali licenziosi per mezzo diuomini depravati." But that the evil in Italy is not entirely of modern date, may be seen by the fourth page, where the author attributes the origin of it to the school of Voltaire and to the writings of Byron.

tear up and overwhelm everything in its course.”* But as agitation and alarm in religion are not always signs of death and torpor, this great fermentation may be only the breaking up of a false peace and a false security, and prelusive to a time of healing; and as the Germanic race is especially concerned, and of all others one most susceptible of religious impressions, and least likely to be long satisfied in occupying an untenable neutral ground between evangelic Protestantism and the Papacy; it is thought probable that they will eventually acknowledge their offence and fall back again into the ancient fold of the Church of Rome. It was by engraftment on “the vigorous stock of the Germanic race,”† we are told, that

* The above passages are taken from a work entitled “the Book of the Fathers,” published by J. Parker, West Strand; I copied them several years ago into a note-book, as being applicable to the present state of Germany. But as I have not the work by me, I cannot answer for the exactness of the quotations.

† Ranke.

the Papacy found a glory and a greatness awaiting it to which it never ventured to aspire. And although it has now lost its hold upon the faith and homage of the great bulk of that remarkable people, hopes are entertained that this may be recovered again. I confess, that considering the age of the world in which we are living, the signs of the times, and the present state of Roman-Catholicism on the continent, I do not think this likely to be the case. In the first place, *the present revival of Romanism may not be so real as it appears to be. As in the case of a languishing patient, there may be now and then indications of a sudden restoration to health, when the result proves them to be only the forerunners of dissolution ; the last and greatest effort of decaying health to recover its lost ground may be that which immediately precedes final decay.* Moreover, infidelity has not yet run out its downward race ; it is vigorous and full of energy. And what enchantment shall avail to reduce a

people who hate subjection in religion, and who have already been long emancipated, to subordinate their wills and prostrate their understandings, and become unconditionally obedient to domineering ecclesiastical authority ? But although the Germans may not be brought back again into the fold of Rome, God may, in his good providence, bring good out of evil, and by the outpouring of his Spirit, cause this fermentation in religion, this yearning for an altered state of things, to be productive of a great spiritual revival : and this I think more likely to be the case. There are times when the unsatisfied want in the soul of the unbelieving seems to make itself known with more than ordinary power, and human nature seems to crave for light, although unconscious where it is to be found. The world with its passing glory appears less attractive in such times of peril and uncertainty ; and the eye of man is unconsciously directed beyond this world and made to

look tremblingly to that which is to come. In such times as these we are told, "human nature shaken to its base and feeling itself driven towards unknown seas, seeks to re-bind itself to the shore ; it endeavours to renew its broken bands ; it makes a desperate effort to re-establish those connexions without which it can neither have peace nor security.* To make this want unfruitful, and to throw a gloomy shade over it, by causing men to deny and reject the only thing that can fill up the vacuum in the heart, seems to be the great object of the enemy of souls in the present day.

As a world-restoring genius, as a great human prophet, the modern sceptic is willing enough to receive and acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth. But as the everlasting Son of God, and as the "desire of the nations," through whom the broken band between God and man has been restored, this is what modern infidelity cannot estimate,

* Vinet.

this is the mystery it cannot fathom. Many a modern sceptic, for instance, can compass and believe much that is written in the Scriptures of truth. But that God had such deep thoughts of love towards us, as to send his co-equal and co-eternal Son to save and to redeem a lost and fallen world, this is the great stone of offence in the way of the modern sceptic, in any other way than this he will seek for salvation ; even rather than believe in this, he will deify human nature and “ erect his own vices into divinities,” clamouring for virtue where wrath and bitterness prevail, for purity where sin is regnant, and for goodwill and love where hatred and malice preponderate. But as the time of anxiety and alarm in the individual Christian is often the forerunner of inbreaking light and peace, so let us hope and pray that this winnowing and sifting of the nations, may be the preliminary to a time of great healing and universal prosperity ; even to the ultimate production of

that better state of things long predicted, when that great outpouring of the Holy Spirit shall take place, which shall be the complete fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel ; when the heavenly power to serve God and obey him, which was lost through the first Adam, shall be in a superabundant measure given back to man through the second Adam ; and when the malignant enemies of our race, who once overcame, shall then be more completely overcome. The expectation is very general that such a time is at hand.

“There is a sort of vague and undefinable impression upon all spirits,” observed a late eminent divine, “of some great evolution of the present system under which we live—some looking towards, as well as longing after immortality—some mysterious but yet powerful sense within every heart, of the present as a state of confinement and thralldom ; and that yet a day of light and largeness and liberty is coming.

We cannot imagine of unbelievers, that they have any very precise or perhaps confident anticipation on the subject, any more than the world at large had of the advent of our Messiah—though a very general expectation was abroad of the approaching arrival of some great personage upon earth. And in like manner there is abroad even now the dim and the distant vision of another advent, of a brighter and a blander period, that is now obscurely seen, or guessed at through the gloom by which humanity is encompassed—a kind of floating anticipation, suggested perhaps by the experimental feeling that there is now the straitness of an oppress and limited condition ; and that we are still among the toils and the difficulties and the struggles of an embryo state of existence. It is altogether worthy of remark, that, in like manner as through the various countries of the world, there is a very wide impression of a primeval condition of virtue and blessedness from which we have

fallen—so there seems a very wide expectation of the species being at length restored to the same health and harmony and loveliness as before. The vision of a golden age at some remote period of antiquity, is not unaccompanied with the vision of a yet splendid and general revival of all things. Even apart from revelation there floats before the world's eye the brilliant perspective of this earth being at length covered with a righteous and regenerated family. This is a topic on which even philosophy has its fascinating dreams ; and there are philanthropists in our day who disown Christianity, yet are urged forward to enterprize by the power and the pleasure of an anticipation so beautiful. They do not think of death. They only think of the moral and political glories of a renovated world, and of these glories as unfading. It is an immortality after all that they are picturing. While they look on that Gospel which brought life and immortality to light, as a fable, still

they find that the whole capacity of their spirits is not filled, unless they can regale them with the prospect of an immortality of their own. Nothing short of this will satisfy them ; and whether you look to those who speculate on the perfectibility of mankind, or those who think in economic theories that they are laying the basis on which might be reared the permanent happiness of the nations, you see but the creature spurning at the narrowness of its present condition, and waiting in earnest expectancy for the manifestation of the sons of God.” *

* Chalmers's Lectures on the Romans.

IX.

THE CENTRE OF UNITY.

BOTH in the political and religious world, the tendency of the times is to centralize and consolidate things that have been long separate, or that have been broken up by discord and change. The times are perilous and full of distraction, the remedy adopted is to fall back on new centres, and melt into one, things that are now incoherent and disunited. The first great French Revolution was, in one of its later developments, nothing but a gigantic attempt to cause the world to centralize on a particular spot ; * the last acts of which tremendous

* The object of Napoleon, Alison tells us, " was to concentrate the world in Europe, Europe in France, France in Paris, and Paris in himself."

experiment, some consider, remain yet to be exhibited to the world. But it is when associated with religion, that the idea assumes force and durability. And here the idea is probably borrowed from a central city, once honoured above all others, which kept alive the sole vestiges of pure faith for a thousand years, when all our fathers were sunk in idolatry. And thus Mecca parodied Jerusalem, and was also an all-controlling centre of unity, towards which the stream of pilgrimage was made to run ; and from which light and healing were to be imparted to the nations of the faithful. Even previous to the time of Mahomet, Mecca, which, we are told, encloses the Caaba, or model of the sacred shrine where Adam worshipped in paradise, " was the resort of pilgrims from all parts of Arabia." " Four months in every year were devoted to the rites of pilgrimage, and held sacred from all violence and warfare. Hostile tribes then laid aside their arms ; took the heads from their spears ;

traversed the late dangerous deserts in security ; thronged the gates of Mecca, clad in pilgrim garb ; made their seven circuits round the Caaba, in imitation of the angelic host ; touched and kissed the mysterious black stone ; drank and made ablutions at the well of Zem-Zem, in memory of their ancestor Ishmael ; and having performed all other primitive rites of pilgrimage, returned home in safety, to resume their weapons and their wars again." *

But, it is to the great rival chairs of Rome and the Kremlin, that the eye of the modern contemplatist of religious centralization is now particularly directed. The head of the Slavonic race is not only a hero or a conqueror, like Tamerlane or Napoleon, but also a deeply imbedded religious idea. As far back as the year 1594, Ranke tells us, that the Pope of Rome sent an embassy to invite the Czar to throw down the wall of partition between Rome and Moscow, and

* The Life of Mahomet by Washington Irving.

to acknowledge the supremacy of the Papal city. But Borus Godenow sent back word to the Pope, that he considered himself the only true Head of the Church on earth, and the city where he dwelt as the spot around which the homage of the nations was to concentrate. Since the time of Borus Godenow, Rome has lost much, and Russia has gained much ; * and a modern German writer has predicted, that the " old continent of Europe " will not long have room and accommodation for these two rival systems, this " great church-politic-dualisms ; " but admits, that Rome's joint supremacy will probably be tolerated until the day when restored Byzantium shall become a centre of unity more glorious and all-controlling than the present decadent and imbecile city of the Tiber.

But Rome's past history displays the most

* " Never since the God Terminus," says Alison, " first receded with the Roman eagle in the provinces beyond the Euphrates, has so steady an advance to universal empire been made."

gigantic effort ever made on the earth to enchain the thoughts and the fealty of men, around one common visible centre of unity. "The history of Rome," we are told, "is that of a municipality pushing its vigorous arms in all directions, extending its influence on every side, without suffering its own central power to be affected, without admitting any other city or country to share in its dominion : other cities were but her daughters or her slaves, and her extensive provinces were but like so many vast suburbs encircling her walls. The chief magistrates in the Roman city were the chief magistrates in the Roman world. This phenomenon of a single municipal government administering the affairs of a wide surrounding territory, and of distant provinces and colonies, is the very type of ancient political civilization : there is nothing like it in Europe in modern times. London is a great municipality, but the power of its magistracy is confined within its own walls. If we con-

nect with it the neighbouring city of Westminster, it derives considerable political importance from its being the locality where the national government is accustomed to meet ; but in this respect its character is very different from Rome. It draws together the lines of influence which flow from the provinces ; it receives and concentrates them : but the city of Rome was the centre of a system of absolute power spreading its ramifications over the world.”*

Rome’s centralizing supremacy was gone, it was supposed, forever, when she was made to bend like a broken reed under the infliction of the Gothic tempest : then it was said in that city, ‘ the world is fallen.’ But under the influence of the great Gregory, she was seen to rise to new power and glory, animated, as Gibbon tells us, by “ a new principle of life ;” and “ under the palladium of the newly-discovered remains of two Hebrew fishermen.” She did not, however, even

* “ The Dark Ages,” or the dawn of modern civilization.

then, owe her supremacy over other churches to the reality of Peter's ever having been at Rome, but to Rome's former greatness ; for if, when Constantine embraced and maintained the Christian religion, the imperial majesty had resided in France, as it did five hundred years later, the Pope would not have been the Pope of Rome, but of some other city. "The Bishop of Rome," says Guicciardini, "was taken generally for the chief of all other churches and spiritual jurisdiction, as the successor of the apostle St. Peter, both because that city, by her ancient pre-eminence and greatness, kept still the name and the majesty of the empire, as also because from her the Christian religion was spread over the greatest part of Europe, and lastly because Constantine himself, baptized by Silvester, yielded willingly that power to him and his successors."

We need not recapitulate here the gradual advances of Papal Rome to a supremacy almost universal, and the means that

were used to attain this object ; until at last in the plenitude of her power and haughtiness she established the decree, “Subesse Romano Pontificii omni humanæ creaturæ declaramus, dicimus, definimus, et pronunciamus omnino esse de necessitate salutis ;” * and finally attempted to appropriate to herself all that is foreshadowed in the Scriptures, not of the Church militant on earth, working its chequered way in the wilderness, in the midst of persecution, contempt, and peril, but of a triumphant Church—if not in heaven, at least of a triumphant state of Christianity on earth—“when all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord ; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Him.” What the ancient prophets saw in vision—what the fathers of the Church delighted to anticipate by faith—that same glorious era Rome parodied and attempted to imi-

* Boniface VIII, De Majoritate et obedientia, Cap. Unam Sanctam.

tate, forgetful that during this dispensation of the Church militant on earth, only one great city is represented as ruling over the nations of the world, a city drunk with the blood of the saints, and destined at last to light up, with the fires of her burning, the final jubilee of the militant Church on earth. For although enthusiasm and the interest we feel in the subject may cause some writers to colour the picture too brightly, yet if language of the most solemn kind, uttered by men divinely commissioned, has meaning, a great and magnificent triumph must yet await the Christian religion on earth ; which shall probably be ushered in and concluded by striking displays of providential and retributive power, and of which not Rome or Byzantium, but a restored Jerusalem, very different from the present fallen city, shall probably be the principal triumphant scene, if not the centre.* There exists, even now, a very pre-

* Monsignor Bruni, Bishop of Ugento, in a work published

valent belief amongst Christians that a great final triumph of the religion of Christ is near at hand, that apostacy, paganism, infidelity, the empire and result of Satanic rule and experience of nearly 6000 years, shall all speedily be driven fugitive before existing means ; that is, before conflicting communities of Christians without order, unity, harmony, or combination ; but surely the sad experience of the past, and the present distracted state of the most perfect of surviving churches, tend to induce less exorbitant hopes. Could mortal hands safely be entrusted with such tremendous powers of conquest ? Hitherto the possession of power has spoiled even the best of men, and great success even in the work of God has been more than the worthiest and the

at Rome in 1847, entitled, “ *L' Ultima Epoca della Chiesa sulla terra,*” seems to think on the other hand, that the final Antichrist will yet make Jerusalem the centre of an universal empire, and only overcloud the glory of Rome for a time, until at last the Antichrist is cut down by divine judgment, and the ultimate victory of the Church of Rome is accomplished.

wisest could bear without injury ; even the devoted Paul had to be given "the thorn in the flesh," lest he should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation with which he was favoured. It cannot be forgotten moreover that "the enemy of souls is ever most active in sowing tares in fruitful seasons," and that the human heart even regenerate, is never entirely disenterred of selfishness and partiality, and hence the discord that always has prevailed in the Christian camp. There is every antecedent probability therefore, independent of Scripture proof, that in order to roll back the tide of Satanic conquest and make Christianity the religion of all lands and countries, something more is required than ordinary means, some great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, with some striking providential interference on behalf of man, of which we have already heard of instances in the Mosaic and early Christian dispensations.

One striking mark of the present dispensation, is the maintenance of the kingdom of heaven in the hearts of the faithful by the invisible influences of the Holy Spirit. Christ, the sun and centre of the Church, is now "as a king who hath gone into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return." Meanwhile, St. James tells us the primary object of the militant Church with reference to the Gentiles, is "to take out of them a people for his name ;" * in the aggregate a great multitude which no man could number, but in their generation a noble minority who walked by faith and followed Christ in the midst of an ungodly world, counting the reproach of Christ great riches, and looking unto the recompence of the reward. But when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea," the Church shall be no longer militant, but victorious. And a new dispensation, or higher

* Acts xv. 13, 14.

accomplishment of the Divine plan, shall then be ushered in. And surely the past wonderful history, the peculiar central position, the many not obscure prophetic references to the subject, render it probable that if ever a glorious and all-controlling centre of unity is to be established on earth, Jerusalem shall be the central spot.* Such an expectation as this was not foreign to the ancient Fathers of the Church and the immediate successors of the apostles. Justin Martyr confessed that "he and all that are every way orthodox Christians, do know both the future resurrection of the body, and the thousand years in Jerusalem, that shall be re-edified, adorned, and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, and others declare." So also Tertullian in his book against Marcion, chap. 24, uses words to

* There is something remarkable in the words of Alison, "that in the last ages of the world man by an indelible instinct will revert to those regions of his pristine existence with the same interest with which the individual looks back to the scenes of his own infancy."

the following effect. "For we also confess that a kingdom is promised us on earth (but before that in heaven, and in another state, viz. after the resurrection) for a thousand years in the city of Divine workmanship, Jerusalem, brought down from heaven." And again Lactantius expressed the belief that after the coming of Christ, "The holy city shall be placed in the midst of the earth, in which the builder thereof, God, shall abide, together with his ruling just ones." "Now surely," to use the words of Mede, who quotes these, and various other additional authorities, "all this smoke of tradition could not have arisen but from some fire of truth anciently made known." Out of "this smoke of tradition" Rome's parody has probably sprung; and out of "this fire of truth" have probably originated the beautiful lines of an Anglican Bishop, with which we now conclude.

"E'en now perhaps wide waving o'er the land,
The mighty angel lifts his golden wand;

Courts the bright vision of descending power,
Tells every gate, and measures every tower,
And chides the tardy seals that yet detain,
Thy Lion, Judah, from his destined reign."

HERBER.

N. B.—The above Essay, and especially the following one, are in part repetitions of two pamphlets written by the author when curate of South Ferriby, in Lincolnshire, in 1842—3, which went through several editions subsequently to their being then published for the author.

X

THE HOPE OF THE FUTURE.

IF we attempt briefly to track the progress of Christianity from the East to the West, we shall see that the Christian religion did not maintain its hold over districts conquered by primitive efforts, whilst further regions were yielding to the power of one continuously advancing impulse. "The course of Christianity has hitherto resembled the emigrations of a pilgrim, rather than the triumphant establishments of a conqueror."* There have been periods of advance and retrocession, of expanding movement and deadened energy. Truth, we know, is destined to prevail, it is superior to all hazards ; but it has hitherto had

* M'Neile's Lectures.

to struggle through various vicissitudes of strife. It is indeed true, that during the first three centuries of the Christian era, "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed," that the early Christians even then did anticipate the happy period of the complete ingathering of the nations; but the motion communicated from the centre soon began to vacillate, and the time was delayed by the growing strength of apostacy. Apostacy ultimately became regnant—truth oppressed and subordinate; and thus it is that most of the later eras of movement in the history of the Church relate to the efforts of repressed truth, striving to emancipate itself from the yoke of apostacy. The present eventful epoch, however, assumes quite a different character: apostacy is no longer regnant as in former times, and although making a convulsive effort to regain its lost dominion, it is weak at the centre, full of decrepitude, and losing ground where its chief strength ought to lay. Even

as far back as 1840, we were told by Professor Von Raumer, that the Pope was "only upheld by his ecclesiastical position and by foreign protection;" and that, "If an insurmountable wall were raised around the states of the Church, the majority of the inhabitants would declare against the Papal government, and forthwith put an end to it. It is scarcely to be conceived," continued he, "that the government can long continue to go on in its own strength in the same manner as it has hitherto done."*

On the other hand, as the great modern opponent, not only of evangelic Christianity, but more especially of superstition and usurped ecclesiastical power; we behold the sudden growth of a new agency, which is waxing vigorous, and flourishing broadly, in connexion with popular movement in the very centre of Christendom. This infidel power, the "*Popolopapismo*," so much dreaded by

* Italy in 1840, by Von Raumer, Professor of History, Berlin.

the Pope, and already full of latent life and vigour even in the suburbs of the Vatican, will certainly continue to play an important part in the future history of Europe, being prominently personified by masses of men, full of energy, and devoid of principle. And although apostacy may be able for a time to keep down this insatiable aggressor, even to advance in contact with it, the two will never ultimately coalesce ; for infidelity once more triumphant, would not probably tolerate the coeval existence of any religious creed whatever.

Now, it is generally thought by those who study the signs of the times, that the Holy Scriptures recognize a state of society similar to that under which we now live, as being indicative of contraction upon the great crisis of all time, viz. the fall of apostacy, and the ultimate victory of the Church of Christ.

And it is evident that the attention of modern Christians has been directed to a

series of prophetic passages, relating to an advanced period in the history of the Church, which is distinguished by the phenomenon of an unexampled diffusion of light, coincident with the prevalence of an extensive spread of infidel principles. The same epoch is marked by "the increase of knowledge," great religious activity, a general going "to and fro," and proclamation of the everlasting Gospel ; and yet, also, by the development of outbursts of popular violence, giving rise to "distress of nations," times of peril, and general perplexity.

The important question therefore suggests itself, What shall the end of these things be? What is the pre-ordained order of means, by which the final overthrow of Atheism and Apostacy shall be effected? Do the Holy Scriptures hold out any ground of hope, of the spontaneous submission of the Antichristian powers, under the mild aggressive agency of persuasion? Do they

lead us to anticipate an easy-won victory of truth, with error taken captive by the force of argument? Or do they not rather represent the antagonists of the Gospel as holding out to the last with inflexible obstinacy, and finally as being arrested in the full career of impiety, by the process of purgation, and by the visitation of divine judgment poured out upon the oppressor?

There are, indeed, eminent Christians, who are even now anticipating the speedy submission of the powers of darkness under nothing but the quickened agency of existing means: but, surely, the lines of prophecy, the signs of the times, and the factiously divided state of the Christian world, tend to induce less exorbitant hopes. The Christian communities are neither closing ranks, nor casting off minor differences, nor rallying round the standard of the cross. The Church is ailing, and beset with danger, as she ever hath been on her allotted pathway to final victory. Her privilege is

now to wrestle and suffer, that she may hereafter triumph and reign.

But the time of providential interferences is approaching ; and many are the promises given, to assure her that the wonders which were evolved around her infant cradle shall be exceeded by those which shall come to pass at the time of her final victory. It is chiefly because the human mind repugates the operation of new causes, and attaches permanence and durability to whatever is known and visible, that this subject is so unpopular. There is much in Scripture to prove that there shall be yet exhibited to the world a triumphant state of the Church on earth, precursive to her final rest in heaven. " And where," it has been asked, " has God declared that this material earth shall be a memorial of wrath, but not of mercy ? Where is it the recorded verdict of his immutable will, that the scene and place of redemption shall be separated from the people to be redeemed ? That the earth,

with all its variety of garniture and beauty, once fitted to be the birth-place of their happiness, and given to them as the patrimony and sovereignty of their race, shall be torn away from their possession, and given up to the avenging flame? Is it indeed the verdict of revelation, that the earth on which the Redeemer walked and communed with men in the hour of his humiliation, shall never be the scene of his fellowship with them in the day of his power and glory? Did He, as a way-faring man tarry with them only for a night, and ascend but to return in the vengeance of insulted majesty to annihilate the scene on which he endured this dishonour?" * Surely not! The prayer he had concentrated for the completion of his own work, in those two remarkable expressions, "Thy kingdom come," "Thy will be done on earth," points the eye of faith to a different conclusion. And, "it was not until the Bishop of

* Prospects of the Church, by the Hon. and Rev. G. T. Noel.

Rome began to claim supremacy, and by sitting as a priest upon his kingly throne, endeavoured to antedate the glories of the true Melchizedec ;” * that different views began to prevail ; for “ among the best of Christians, for two hundred and fifty years it passed current for a tradition apostolical, and as such is delivered by many fathers of the second and third centuries.” † But ever since apostacy became regnant and imperial, the second advent of Christ to put down Satanic power, and accomplish the restitution of all things for which St. Peter “ longed and hasted,” and to which the dying apostle Paul looked forward with the fervour of assured hope, has dwindled away into a mere abstraction. It is to this great effulgent promise of Scripture, that the Church has been directed to look forward with expectant hope, the day and the hour of its manifestation being purposely veiled in obscurity, in order to pro-

* Dalton on the Advent.

† Whitby on Tradition.

mote vigilance and spiritual preparation in all ages. "As the rankest weeds will spring up in the richest soil," it is not to be rejected because it is liable to abuse ; it was a prominent feature in the teaching of the apostles—death a subordinate one, for truly, the human heart can be brought to contemplate death with the greatest levity ; whereas the second coming of the "Son of man to execute judgment and justice in the earth," is a more stirring and heart-searching subject of address, and, it has been well said, that, "It is no escape from this truth to allege, that so it has ever seemed to each succeeding generation in its turn ; that seen near at hand, the features of each present danger have always worn the most appalling aspect ; that the *now* has always seemed uncertain, always been fading into the *coming*, always threatening the endurance of all things ; that dangers have ever been around Christ's church ; that always it has seemed she must be swept away by the

great earth-flood, and that with her, all social peace and order would be utterly obliterated. No doubt this is true, for such is the law of our being. "The judge standeth behind the door." Ever since He left this earth, who ascended from the hill at Bethany, He has been returning—some glow has ever rested on the Eastern skies. But it is no less true, that as the time of his sure coming draweth nigh, these signs of his approach wax clearer and more definite. The gleaming streaks of a coming morning mount up the skies; the voices which usher in its presence are multiplying around us: the hum and the crowd, and the tread of an awakening world, rise in the full tide upon the watcher's ears; all things that are shaken, holding themselves in an eager readiness, for the new order of the coming day."*

* Extract of Charge of the Ven. Archdeacon S. Wilberforce. 1842—3.

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